



THE FLORIDA SENATE

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SENATOR GARY SIPLIN

19th District

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February 24, 2011

Chairman Julius Genachowski
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

**Re: Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service Lifeline and Link Up
CC Docket No. 96-45; WC Docket 03-109**

Dear Chairman Genachowski,

At a time when nearly 20% of African-American men and nearly 14% of African-American women are unemployed - and a much greater number are underemployed - in this country, we want the FCC to understand how valuable the free phone services are that the Lifeline program provides. As you know, African-Americans have been and continue to be disproportionately affected by our current recession.

The ability of low-income citizens of this country, whether they be black, white or Hispanic, to have access to phone service is crucial to their climb up the economic ladder and out of poverty. The Lifeline program has been a critical factor in empowering people to go out and find work, knowing that if a job is proffered, they will be able to pick up the phone and accept. This is in addition to the very basic right of access to emergency services that Lifeline provides.

The FCC's Federal-State Joint Board on Universal Service Lifeline and Link Up recently made a set of recommendations to the Commission on how to reduce fraud, waste and abuse within the system. We are fully supportive of the Board's recommendations for making Lifeline a more efficient and sustainable program. Our one area of concern is in capping low-income support. Historically, low-income support of the fund has had a very low penetration rate. While the cost for low-income support has grown since the start of the recession, it still remains minimal compared to the area of High Cost. Likewise, we are concerned by discussion by some commentators of a mandatory monthly service fee.

REPLY TO:

- ☐ 1436 North Pine Hills Road, Orlando, Florida 32808 (407) 297-2071
- ☐ 205 Senate Office Building, 404 South Monroe Street, Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1100 (850) 487-5190

Senate's Website: www.flsenate.gov

MIKE HARIDOPOLOS
President of the Senate

MICHAEL S. "MIKE" BENNETT
President Pro Tempore

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This would place an undue administrative burden on both carriers and consumers, and would appear to discourage registration by eligible consumers. The best approach to curtailing fraud and abuse is establishment of an eligibility database.

The Commission should act quickly to consider the recommendations outlined in the report. However, this should not be done without consideration of the Lifeline program's continued health and availability. The ability of the most economically challenged citizens of this country to have access to free phone service is of critical concern to us, as it should be to the FCC. We urge you to not adopt policies that would cap support for this program, or in any way limit competition in a marketplace that is already underserved.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to seeing how the FCC handles this extremely important matter.

God Bless,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'G. Siplin', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Gary Siplin
The Florida Senate
District 19